

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT  
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING  
Minutes of October 26, 2021**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Nathaniel Miller (absent), Charles Morse, and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Laurie Baroffio (Finance Director), Mark Depman, MD (Central Vermont Prevention Coalition), Eva Zaret (Central Vermont Prevention Coalition), Olivia Leclerc (Central Vermont Prevention Coalition), Donald J. Smith, Jeff Ott, Logan Potkowski, Cassie Morse, Lydia Petty, Ann Gilbert, Shannon Doney, Nate Poe, Carolyn Stevens, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Participants had the option of attending the meeting either in person or remotely through Go-to-Meeting.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** Those persons present were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance. The remote contingent also participated as much as possible.

- III. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

**IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):**

- a. Mark Depman, MD, Eva Zaret, and Olivia Leclerc: Central Vermont Prevention Coalition (CVPC).** Dr. Depman is the Central Vermont Medical Center (CVMC) Emergency Department Medical Director. About six (6) years ago, after treating yet another drug overdose patient in the emergency room, he and his staff felt it was time to do something and take direct action regarding the opioid crisis here in Central Vermont. There were numerous local groups then in existence that addressed substance abuse so Dr. Depman and his associates decided to bind them together into a collaborative effort, which became the CVPC. According to CVPC literature, the CVMC serves as the foundational "backbone" member of the coalition and in coordination with the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC), was able to obtain a \$1,000,000 three-year federal Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP) grant. These grant funds will be used to provide Central Vermont residents with substance abuse problems with "support, services, and understanding from multiple points of entry." Dr. Depman said although the focus of CVPC has been on the larger, more urban communities Montpelier and Barre, it now is looking to extend its services to more rural communities like Northfield. He said CVPC would like to partner with Northfield regarding future opportunities. Ms. Zaret said CVPC would like feedback from Northfield officials and community leaders regarding the best strategies for publicizing their activities and the services available to residents. In other communities, there have been efforts to assist women with substance abuse and health problems by providing one place where all their concerns can be addressed together. In addition, there have been phone banks established to help those reaching out for assistance. Such efforts could be extended to Northfield, which already has an organization in existence (Central Vermont New Directions) that has undertaken such initiatives as Prescription Drug Take-Back Days at the Northfield Police Station, etc. Ms. Zaret said CVPC would like to return to the Select Board periodically with updates on their local initiatives. Ms. Leclerc said CVPC would like to commence its efforts in Northfield with a community gathering perhaps centered around a common meal. Substance abuse experts would be present to answer any questions participants might have. Ms. Leclerc would like the Select Board members' suggestions regarding how best to hold this community forum as well as a local contact person. Dr. Depman said this community forum would be advertised several weeks in advance and probably should have a remote component for those who would rather not attend in person. He also wanted to know if there was a Northfield resident with a personal interest in substance abuse matters who would be willing to act as an intermediary between CVPC and the Northfield community.

Chair Maxwell then asked if the Select Board members had any questions regarding CVPC and its programs. Board member Goodrich said she had no questions at this time but this seemed to be a great program. Board member Morse said over his lifetime he has seen a number of individuals struggle with various forms of substance abuse. He hopes this organization will establish itself in Northfield to the betterment of the community. Board member Morse said once CVPC's grant expires, perhaps it will join the ranks of local non-profits that seek fiscal support from Northfield voters on Town Meeting Day. Board member Stevens also supports CVPC's efforts and is grateful for their good work. Chair Maxwell also thanked Dr. Depman, Ms. Zaret, and Ms. Leclerc for the valuable information provided tonight. He did suggest using the Community Room for a community forum/pizza party as it can accommodate several people and has the set up for including people in a remote conversation. Chair Maxwell also suggested Manager Schulz serve as the municipality's contact person for CVPC. He cannot at this time think of a Northfield resident with a specific interest willing to act as community liaison but someone may come forward in the near future. Chair Maxwell said Northfield Police Chief John Helfant would be another valuable contact person. He added that Manager Schulz would be the person to speak with when CVPC would like to be placed on future Select Board agendas. Board member Morse noted the organizations seeking funding on Town Meeting Day often provide Northfield-based data for publication in the Town Report to show how their efforts directly affect certain numbers of our residents. Perhaps CVPC could provide such local data at this community forum in order to impress upon residents that this really is a problem here in Northfield. Dr. Depman said he would try to gather this information for public distribution. Chair Maxwell again thanked the CVPC representatives for their report tonight and their good work throughout the year.

## **V. DEPARTMENT HEAD REPORT**

**a. Laurie Baroffio, Finance Director.** Ms. Baroffio first wanted to thank the Select Board members for the flowers, refreshments, etc. that were provided for the gathering held a couple months ago in recognition of her thirty (30) years of employment with the municipality.

**1. FY 2020/2021 Year End Financial Statements.** Ms. Baroffio said now that the auditors have completed their report, this fiscal year has been officially closed. The audit report should be ready for formal presentation and discussion at a Select Board meeting next month. The fiscal year ended with a \$550,000 surplus that will be added to the previous prior fiscal year surpluses, resulting in \$786,000 in undesignated funds. These monies will be available for budgeting purposes when the FY 2022-2023 municipal budget is drafted and discussed in the next few months. Among the major reasons for this surplus include the \$49,000 in net funding provided by CIC Health to the municipality to cover the expense of the Northfield Ambulance Service providing free COVID-19 tests to Central Vermont residents. There also were increases Town Clerk and Current Use revenue. The Highway Department was provided with \$39,000 in supplemental state aid. The Northfield Police Department saw significant savings (\$199,000) in personnel costs mainly due to two (2) full-time officers being absent due to active military service. The Highway Department budget saw about \$85,000 in savings mainly due to a mild winter that reduced overtime and road material costs. The municipal pool did not open in summer 2020 due to the pandemic and that resulted in about \$60,000 in budget savings for FY 2020/2021.

Chair Maxwell asked if the Select Board members had any questions for Ms. Baroffio. Board member Goodrich had none but was grateful for the favorable report. Board member Morse noted this was the first municipal budget subject to a world-wide pandemic so this truly was an unusual experience. Board member Stevens wonders how the prior year surplus will be handled in the upcoming budget sessions.

Chair Maxwell thanked Ms. Baroffio for the good report and her excellent service to the municipality. He hopes the undesignated funds can be used to keep the local tax rate as low as possible.

Donald Smith believes the FY 2020-2021 budget included the twenty (20) year bond that paid for the Union Brook Road reconstruction project. He felt the project has not been completed as the road remains unlined and there are some sharp curves without guardrails. Chair Maxwell said the voter-approved bond did cover the cost of repaving the road and that all the paving and drainage work has been completed. Road lining and other safety improvements would be a separate expense and could be included in the next fiscal year budget.

**2. FY 2021/2022 Financial Statements as of September 30, 2021.**

Ms. Baroffio also provided the Select Board members with financial statements covering the first three (3) months of the current fiscal year. She noted that the recent increases in NAS fees charged projects a \$12,000 increase in NAS revenue. Revenue from COVID-19 testing has generated a net profit of \$12,000. There is no indication how long this program will last. Also, Current Use Revenue is \$18,000 above the budgeted amount. Concerning expenditures, we will see a savings in the Debt Retirement budget of \$23,000 due to reduced interest rates. Ms. Baroffio currently is projecting a \$35,000 overage in the NPD personnel budget but overtime expenses might be reduced should a vacant full-time position is filled in the near future. The NAS personnel budget now is projected at \$11,000 over budget and run pay expenses are tracking three percent (3%) higher than last year. There will be some savings in the NAS budget as the department's new paramedic level status will result in a decrease of paramedic intercept expenses. The legal fees line item in the Management Support budget now seems high due to expenses associated with the tax sale last August but these costs should be recoverable. The line items for health insurance costs should provide some savings as Ms. Baroffio anticipated rate increases that ultimately did not occur. The Highway Department has received \$8,464 in unanticipated state funds so far this year. Personnel costs are projected \$15,000 under budget barring a particularly difficult winter. The equipment maintenance budget has seen \$38,000 expended to date but much of this is related to much-needed repairs to the grader. Overall, Ms. Baroffio believes the municipality is keeping expenses under control but it is difficult to make firm predictions this early in the fiscal year. Board member Stevens is pleased to see that the municipality is doing so well in the current fiscal year. Chair Maxwell noted the updated NAS fees included a new charge for treatment of a patient that doesn't result in transport. He asked if this new charge has been passed on to the patients. Manager Schulz doesn't believe this has been charged as much as it should and will be speaking to the NAS Chief about this.

Donald Smith had questions regarding the legal expenses associated with tax sales. Ms. Baroffio said the municipality compensates the attorney for his assistance with tax sale matters. These legal expenses then are charged to the delinquent taxpayer. When these funds are received, it is considered revenue. Mr. Smith asked if delinquent tax payments pay off the legal charges first. Ms. Baroffio it is standard practice to first cover any legal expenses. Any additional payment funds then are directed to pay the interest and after that there is a split between principal and penalty charges. Mr. Smith thought any tax payments made to the municipality first should be directed to cover any delinquent taxes rather than current taxes.

Ms. Baroffio said any balance of current taxes not paid by the final installment deadline in mid-May is subject to a one-time eight percent (8%) penalty charge in addition to the one percent (1%) monthly interest charge. For that reason, taxpayers may request tax payments go towards their current taxes (unless they specify differently on the payment). Mr. Smith said in his case, applying his payments to current taxes resulted in his property being subject to tax sale earlier this year. This led to an additional \$400 in legal fees being charged to him. Board member Morse said it might be a good time to review the municipality's delinquent tax policy. However, it might be that the current policy has provisions based on state law. Chair Maxwell then thanked Ms. Baroffio for her report on the current fiscal year.

#### **VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- a. **October 12, 2021 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 3-0-1, with Board member Morse abstaining.**
- b. **October 19, 2021 (Special Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

#### **VII. APPROVAL OF BILLS**

- a. **Approval of Warrant #08-22.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #08-22 in the amount of \$103,069.43. Board member Stevens is pleased there aren't additional repair charges related to the 2014 NPD cruiser. This had been a regular expense at one time. Chair Maxwell noted significant repair charges for the Dodge One-Ton (\$4,688.84) and the Western Star (\$4,021.20). Manager Schulz said the former had a gear box issues and the latter had valve problems. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through October 17, 2021.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$98,719.09. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

#### **VIII. SELECT BOARD**

- a. **Regional Emergency Management Committees (REMCs) Appointment.** Manager Schulz said the state legislature passed a law earlier this year that set up these REMCs and require each municipality to provide two (2) voting members to their local committee. The first member automatically is the municipality's Emergency Management Coordinator, which in Northfield is Lawton Rutter. The second member is appointed by the local legislature. Manager Schulz volunteered to serve in this capacity as he already is heavily involved in local emergency response planning matters. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to appoint Manager Schulz to the Regional Emergency Management Committee. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Northfield Transfer Station Agreement.** Manager Schulz said he and the Select Board members have been working over the past month on a new agreement with All Clean Waste Services to continue its operation of the Northfield Transfer Station for the municipality. The current draft that he distributed to the Select Board members includes their concerns as well as the revisions All Clean Waste Services requested. Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Morse, to authorize Manager Schulz to finalize and sign an agreement with All Clean Waste Services to operate the Northfield Transfer Station on behalf of the municipality. Board member Morse said Eric Davis and his crew at All Clean Waste Services does a good job running the Transfer Station. Board member Stevens had a question about one of the provisions in the contract. Board member Goodrich felt that since this was a contract negotiation, any such discussion should take place in executive session. Chair Maxwell agreed and the motion was tabled until after that discussion.

- c. **Turkey Hill Maple Lease Agreement.** Manager Schulz had some new information regarding this matter. As this also is a contract negotiation, this matter also will be discussed in executive session. Northfield's Tree Warden, Russ Barrett, will be included in this discussion.

#### **IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

- a. **Northfield Stormwater/CSO Elimination Project.** Manager Schulz has been formally informed by the State of Vermont that Northfield has been awarded up to \$2,050,000 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for this project. These funds will cover the entire cost of the project. Since the funds will become available in Spring 2022 and the engineering plans are nearly complete, this project should be completed during the 2022 construction season. Manager Schulz added that this ARPA award is separate from the \$1,900,000 in ARPA local recovery funds that Northfield will be receiving over the next two (2) years.
- b. **FY 2022/2023 Northfield Municipal Budget.** Manager Schulz said he has been working with Ms. Baroffio, the various department heads, and municipal committees regarding the drafting of an initial budget for the municipality. The initial draft should be forwarded to the Budget & Financial Review Subcommittee (Board members Goodrich and Morse) early next month.
- c. **Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Community Grant.** Manager Schulz said he met recently with Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC) Chair Deb Zuaro and NCC member Lydia Petty regarding this grant application, which must be submitted by November 22, 2021. Ms. Zuaro agreed to finalize and submit the grant application.

#### **X. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS**

- a. **Budget & Financial Review Subcommittee.** Board member Goodrich would like the subcommittee to have an initial meeting in the near future. Manager Schulz confirmed that the draft budget should be ready in a couple weeks.
- b. **Social Media Misinformation.** Board member Morse noted that social media, especially Facebook, is allowing some individuals to post misinformation about the municipal government as well as local businesses, public organizations, etc. He felt if anyone had a question about the way the Northfield municipality conducts its business, the first step should be to directly contact their local officials. This contact information is freely available through the municipal website ([www.northfield-vt.gov](http://www.northfield-vt.gov)). Board member Morse does believe in the freedom of speech but he doesn't feel spreading misinformation does anyone any good. Chair Maxwell agreed he is more than willing to speak or meet with anyone who has a concern. If he doesn't have the information on hand, he will obtain and provide it as soon as possible.
- c. **Recreation Committee.** Board member Stevens asked about the status of the Recreation Committee. Board member Morse said the former committee was disbanded several months ago and there was an expectation that a new group comprised of regular municipal park users would be formed to notify Manager Schulz of whatever needs to be done in the parks. Board member Stevens said some matters need to be done or have been done wrong. For example, the water to the parks was shut off in early October even though there were some remaining scheduled events that month. Manager Schulz said that matter was corrected and will not reoccur. Board member Stevens asked about this year's "Trunk or Treat" on the Common. Manager Schulz said he has been in contact with the event's organizer, Sally Davidson, and she has been given permission to use the Common that night exactly as in years past. Board member Stevens has heard that the baseball dugouts need repair. Manager Schulz believes this work was completed. Chair Maxwell suggested Manager Schulz could provide updates on recreation matters in the written report he submits to the Select Board every two (2) weeks.

- d. Road Discontinuance.** Board member Stevens asked if any action has been taken on the process to discontinue Bellavance Road (as the property owners have requested). Manager Schulz said the required site visit and public hearing will be advertised soon. These must be advertised at least thirty (30) days in advance.
- e. Northfield Community Volunteers.** Chair Maxwell said the Select Board members received an email from community volunteer Lydia Petty that expresses a number of concerns about how local volunteers are treated (as well as other matters). Ms. Petty said the issues seem to revolve around “communication, support, and follow through.” She said that there appears to be a lack of proper communication between community volunteers and the various appointed and elected boards and committees, with municipal management, and with the general public. The lack of clear communication has allowed for misinformation to spread on social media. Without clear repudiation of such misstatements by municipal leadership, members of the public tend to believe what they have read online. Ms. Petty would like a grievance policy set up so that community volunteers, whether or not they serve on an established committee, can have their concerns addressed and thus be supported by the municipality. There also need to be venues to address social media misinformation that sometimes takes the form of personal attacks. As for “follow through,” Ms. Petty feels that the municipality should do a better job of managing grant funds and implementing projects that are the result of grant applications submitted by community volunteers. She felt once grant funds have been awarded, the municipality should be able to expend those funds by purchasing materials, etc. in a timelier manner. Ms. Petty felt that inadequate administration of grant funding was another source of frustration for the community volunteers who devoted much of their own time obtaining that outside funding. Ms. Petty hopes that the municipality will take needed action to address her concerns and perhaps look to how other Vermont municipalities have dealt with such matters. Chair Maxwell first wanted to commend all local volunteers whether or not they belong to any formal committee, commission, or group. He added that many Northfield residents perform service to the community on their own initiative by picking up trash deposited in public places, putting flowers on covered bridges, etc. As for Ms. Petty’s concerns, Chair Maxwell first would like to hold a meeting that would include himself, Vice-Chair Goodrich, and the chairs of the various municipal committees, commissions, etc. in order to determine the best course of action to move forward. As an aside, Chair Maxwell said he has learned to develop a “thick skin” himself regarding public criticism during his many years as a Village Trustee and on the Town Select Board.

## **XI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)**

- a. Donald Smith: Various Municipal Concerns.** Mr. Smith has lived in Northfield for about four (4) years and has been mostly happy with his time here. However, he has had some unpleasant interactions with some municipal representatives of which he feels the Select Board members should be made aware. Last week (10/21/21) he came to the Municipal Building to speak to Manager Schulz regarding his delinquent tax situation. A heated discussion ensued that ended when Manager Schulz expelled him from the building. Mr. Smith noted that there are security cameras in the building and he requested a copy of the footage to show he did nothing wrong but was refused. He believes that this bad interaction with a member of the public is something the Select Board members should consider. Mr. Smith said his wife also had a bad encounter with Manager Schulz some time ago when she came in to complain about damage done to her tires by the material put on our backroads. Mr. Smith also doesn’t believe Manager Schulz has the authority to expel him from a public building and will have an attorney look into this.

Mr. Smith also had a difficult encounter with NPD Chief Helfant who early one morning gave him a ticket for parking in the road in front of his own house. He believes Chief Helfant did not listen to his explanation for parking that way and the official report subsequently produced did not match the bodycam footage Mr. Smith obtained. Mr. Smith believes Chief Helfant was fired from the Berlin Police Department for similar misbehavior. Board member Morse said that was untrue. Chief Helfant was a member of the Berlin Police Department in good standing when the Northfield municipality hired him as its Police Chief. Mr. Smith also has had problems with Fire Warden Brian Elwell. One day, he had been conducting a burn that had been authorized by Assistant Fire Warden Titus Soble when Mr. Elwell suddenly arrived in a bad mood. He claimed trash was being burned in violation of the burn permit. Mr. Smith disputes this but when he subsequently tried to obtain another burn permit from Mr. Soble, he was told Mr. Elwell would not allow this since trash had been burned. Mr. Smith has tried to contact Mr. Elwell directly afterwards on several occasions without success. Mr. Smith believes the Select Board members should know the type of people they have employed. Chair Maxwell noticed that in a Facebook posting Mr. Smith had claimed that Manager Schulz had forbidden him from being put on the agenda of tonight's meeting. He said that anyone who felt they were being prevented from addressing the Select Board members should contact him as well to resolve the matter. Mr. Smith asked why the videocams in the Municipal Building do not record audio as well as video. Chair Maxwell will look into this. Mr. Smith said he plans to attend all Select Board meetings in future.

- b. Lydia Petty: Community Volunteers Concerns.** Ms. Petty is pleased that the Select Board members will be addressing her concerns in the upcoming meeting of local volunteers, etc. However, she wasn't sure if Chair Maxwell was encouraging her to develop a "thicker skin" herself in response to personal attacks. Chair Maxwell said he was only speaking of his own experience and did not intend any criticism of Ms. Petty. If that is the impression he gave, he sincerely apologizes. Elroy Hill heard Chair Maxwell's earlier comment and he felt Chair Maxwell did not mean to disparage anyone else when he said it.
- c. Carolyn Stevens: New Author in Northfield.** Ms. Stevens noted the reason Board member Miller is not present tonight is that his first novel, "The Memoirs of Stockholm Sven," is being published today. She felt this was a very exciting development for the community and hopes everyone will have a chance to read it.

**XII. EXECUTIVE SESSION.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss contract negotiations with Manager Schulz and Tree Warden Russ Barrett present. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 8:35 p.m.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 9:10 p.m.

Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Morse, to authorize Manager Schulz to finalize and sign an agreement with All Clean Waste Services to operate the Northfield Transfer Station on behalf of the municipality. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

**XIII. ADJOURNMENT.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to adjourn. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 9:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kenneth L. McCann*

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were approved at the Select Board regular meeting of November 9, 2021.